

JOSEPH RANSOHOFF

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JOSEPH RANSOHOFF was born on the twenty-sixth of May, 1853, in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he graduated, in 1870, from the public high school. He immediately matriculated in medicine, graduating in 1874 from the Medical College of Ohio, which, at this time, was one of the largest and best known schools in the country, numbering on its faculty many inspired and inspiring teachers. After securing his degree, he departed for Europe to devote himself to graduate study in Wurtzburg, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and London. In these various centers, he came under the stimulating influence not only of the leaders in surgery but also of the pathologists, internists, and the more prominent teachers in allied clinical subjects. Koelliker, Virchow, Langenbeck, Billroth, Tillaux, Paget, Hebra, Rokitansky, Gerhardt, and Hutchinson seem to have made the deepest impress on his medical consciousness.

The European stay was prolonged for 3 years in order that the young enthusiast might attain membership in the Royal College of Surgeons of England. This degree he secured in April, 1877. He was contemplating his return home, when Sir James Paget recognizing his intellectual capacity and enthusiasm encouraged him to present himself at the examination for fellowship in the Royal College. Young Ransohoff accepted the counsel with the result that in June 1877, he won this very distinguished honor within the almost unprecedentedly short interval of 3 months after attaining his membership degree.

During the summer of 1877, Ransohoff returned to Cincinnati where he was almost immediately afforded the opportunities of demonstrating anatomy in the Medical College of Ohio, and of teaching surgery in the college dispensary. In 1879, after the death of the brilliant Langdon Longworth, he advanced to the position of professor of descriptive anatomy. About the same time he was appointed to the staff of the Good Samaritan Hospital, where he began to hold surgical clinics and to display, as a didactic clinical teacher, that unusual genius which won him a life-long following of eager students. It was during these years that he became interested in surgery of the gall bladder, being among that group of American surgeons who were the first to execute operative attacks on this organ. In 1902, he accepted the chair of surgery in the Medical College of Ohio; later in 1909, he was given the same chair in the University of Cincinnati, when

this institution was organized on the basis of a complete university. After the University of Cincinnati was given the control of the Cincinnati General Hospital, he found himself in a position calling for the talents of administrator, teacher, clinician, and stimulator of men. As we count years, Dr. Ransohoff was still a young man, almost a youth, when he found himself confronted with these large tasks.

How well he met the call can be told best in the words of his friend and biographer, Dr. Albert H. Freiberg: "It was now possible for Dr. Ransohoff to do things for the students of medicine not dreamed of when he began his career as teacher. The opportunity he now had for devoting a greater amount of time to teaching was seized with eagerness, which could not have been greater had it been the first chance of his life to show his ability and to establish his reputation. It were entirely fruitless to attempt the analysis of his success as teacher. A sufficient explanation is found in his enthusiasm and in that of his students."

A biography of Dr. Ransohoff in order to be complete must stress not only his disciplined but also his intuitive grasp of surgical diagnosis, the sane conservatism which characterized his method of establishing the indications for surgical intervention, the soundness of his surgical judgment, and the deliberate sureness of his technique as contrasted with the ordinary concept of deadly brilliance.

Over a long stretch of years, he manifested a deep interest in the problems of so called organized medicine, and took seriously to heart the obligations of membership in the several organizations with which he was affiliated. Among these various societies he counted membership in the American Surgical Association, the Southern Surgical Association, and the Western Surgical Association.

His last presentation of a paper occurred in November, 1920, when in spite of the warnings of a rebellious heart, he delivered an address of particular charm on "Drake and Holmes," at the commemoration of the centennial of the Medical School. Following this address, his Alma Mater crowned his 40 years of tireless service with the degree of Doctor of Laws.

At the time of his death, he was director of the surgical service of the Jewish Hospital of Cincinnati and was largely responsible for the outstanding position which this hospital occupies among the institutions of its type.

From the time that he accepted his first teaching position up to within a short period before his death, he worked day in and day out, uninterruptedly, save for the usual vacation outings. During these years, Dr. Ransohoff published a series of one hundred and fifty papers, covering the entire field of general surgery. As an evidence of the evenness of method underlying his surgical life, it is interesting to note that these publications, beginning in 1879 continued up to within 4 months of his death, and that during all these 42 years there were only three that were barren. In addition to these numerous contributions to journal



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1853-1921

literature, he contributed to Bryant and Buck's and also to Keen's *Systems of Surgery*.

In August 1920, he suffered a threatening attack of angina pectoris. In spite of a compromised heart, he was able to enjoy 3 months of comparative comfort during the 7 months that intervened between his first and the final attack of angina which caused his death on the 10th of March, 1921.

This finishes the annals of the life of Joseph Ransohoff. But how much the tale smacks of the usual date, place, and name technique of the formal method of historical chronology! The present generation, fortunately, has been schooled, in almost all lands, to look for and to expect more than this. Strachey and Guedella in England, Maurois in France, Ludwig in Germany, Brandes in Denmark, Cushing, Sandburg, Woodward and others in America have fired us with the taste of blood, and we claim as our right to know the man behind names, places, and dates. When we seek for the Joseph Ransohoff in the flesh, we find a lover of home and family, a man of charm and grace, a devotee to the silence of the forest and the warmth of the camp fire, a writer of tales, a teller of stories, *bon vivant*, trusted friend of colleagues and students, worshiper of the great among his colleagues of the past, and a delineator competent to cement his heroes skillfully into the pages of medical history with well turned phrases of a pleasing style. This is the Joseph Ransohoff whose passing is still a poignant memory to his friends at home and at large.

PRINTED BY R. R. DONNELLEY & SONS CO., AT CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, U.S.A.